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Windows of global exchange: Dutch ports and the slave trade, 1600–1800

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Abstract

In 2008, Pierre Gervais contended that social and economic developments in the Atlantic were to be ascribed to an overwhelming European intervention in West Africa and the Americas. This article questions Gervais's assumption by stressing how Europeans, West Africans and Americans – individuals and states – mutually influenced urban hierarchies and distributive hubs across three different continents, while arguing that these interactions and interconnections should be seen within a context of entangled histories. This contribution re-examines the Dutch experience of slave trade and shipping to assess the extent to which slave trading and shipping activities influenced port hierarchies in Europe, determined the organization of port hubs in West Africa and helped develop port structures in the Americas. This assessment is anchored in the data provided by the Transatlantic Slave Trade Database, the collections of the Dutch West India Company and the Middleburg Commercial Company, and the notarial archives of Amsterdam and Rotterdam.

Keywords

early modern period, entangled histories, Dutch slave trade, port systems, transatlantic slave trade

In 2008, Pierre Gervais contended that social and economic developments in the Atlantic were to be ascribed to an overwhelming European intervention in West Africa and the Americas.¹ Even though he did not mention any specific developments, it is reasonable

1. Pierre Gervais, 'Neither Imperial, nor Atlantic: A Merchant Perspective on International Trade in the Eighteenth Century', *History of European Ideas*, 34, No. 4 (2008), 465–73 (at 465–6).

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to assume that slavery, the slave trade and, concomitantly, slave shipping were in mind. This article questions Gervais's assumption that events in the Atlantic were determined and controlled almost solely by European powers and individuals. It stresses how Europeans, West Africans and Americans – individuals and states alike – mutually influenced urban hierarchies and distributive hubs across three different continents, while also arguing that these interactions, interconnections and integrations should be seen within a context of entangled histories. This is understood here to mean a system of mutual influences, reciprocities and asymmetries, as postulated by Michael Werner and Bénédicte Zimmermann under the conceptual premise of *histoire croisée*.²

In the Atlantic, the main distributive hubs were ports, with the emphasis being on tightly knit and complementary networks of river and maritime ports and harbours that served as the infrastructure for the slave trade. In this capacity, Atlantic ports, and especially West African ports, were truly 'windows of global exchange' because they served as places of encounter between different cultures, commercial traditions, political systems and institutional frameworks.³

This contribution re-examines the Dutch experience of the slave trade and shipping to assess the extent to which slave trading and shipping activities influenced port hierarchies in Europe, determined the organization of port hubs in West Africa and helped develop port structures in the Americas. This assessment is anchored in the data provided by the *Transatlantic Slave Trade Database* (TSTD hereafter), multiple collections of the Dutch West India Company (WIC), the notarial archives of the cities of Amsterdam (SA) and Rotterdam (SR) and the documents of the Middleburg Commercial Company (MCC).

Ports in the Republic and the Slave Voyages

In general terms, the port system of the United Provinces of the Netherlands, commonly referred to as the Dutch Republic (and nowadays the Netherlands), was divided into three distinct areas. The south (closer to the border with present-day Belgium) was dominated by the ports of Middleburg, Flushing, Veere and Zierikzee, all within the province of Zeeland. These southern ports were particularly important as gateways to the River Scheldt and as markers of the political border between the Northern (breakaway provinces controlled by the States-General) and Southern Spanish Netherlands. The second area comprised the delta ports of Dordrecht, Den Briel, Maassluis, Schiedam, Delfshaven and Rotterdam, which developed around the estuaries of the Rhine and the Meuse rivers, roughly in the present-day province of South Holland. The third area was formed by Kampen (a former Hanseatic town), Medemblik, Enkhuizen, Hoorn and Amsterdam, with these ports together dominating the Zuiderzee region and access to the River IJssel.

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2. Michael Werner and Bénédicte Zimmermann, 'Beyond Comparison: Histoire Croisée and the Challenge of Reflexivity', *History and Theory*, 45, No. 1 (2006), 30–50.
 3. Holger Weiss, 'Introduction: Portals of Early Modern Globalisation and Creolisation in the Atlantic World during the Era of the Slave Trade', in Holger Weiss, ed., *Ports of Globalisation, Places of Creolisation. Nordic Possessions in the Atlantic World During the Era of the Slave Trade* (Leiden, 2015), 1–21.

Historically, the ports of Zeeland were closely linked to the ports of Flanders in the Southern Netherlands. In direct collaboration with Antwerp, the ports of Flushing, Middleburg, Veere and Zierikzee maintained the sustainability of the River Scheldt as a primary gateway for luxury and bulk products imported from and into the Baltic, the Mediterranean and other regions and continents.⁴ Even though these Zeeland ports were efficient as transit ports in the Scheldt complex, they were at a disadvantage compared to their Flemish counterparts. The Zeeland hinterland was mainly agricultural and generally unable to provide its ports with high-end products for the highly demanding international routes. For this reason, the success of the Zeeland ports was heavily dependent on their relationships with Flanders, on residual fishing activities and on military-strategic positioning.

The start of the Dutch Revolt against Philip II in the mid-sixteenth century triggered a severe decline in the Zeeland ports as the politically imposed border severed their links with Flanders and ruined the economic position of almost all of them. The only exception was Flushing, which functioned as an advanced naval base for the newly founded Republic from which to attack the Southern Netherlands and enforce the Dutch blockade of the River Scheldt.⁵

The steep decline of the Zeeland ports was also felt in the Rhine and Meuse delta. In that area, however, only the leading port, Dordrecht, seems to have been seriously affected.⁶ Since the city had acquired its staple rights over the Lower Meuse within the political sphere of the Habsburg rulers, the outbreak of the Revolt gave the smaller ports of Rotterdam, Delfshaven, Schiedam, Vlaardingen and Den Briel the confidence to challenge Dordrecht's prominence by supporting the cause of the Prince of Orange and complementing their fisheries and inland trade in the Rhine and the Meuse with luxury and bulk products from the Baltic and the Mediterranean.

When looking at the developments in Zeeland and the delta area, we witness the rise to pre-eminence of a formerly lesser port. However, if Flushing took over from Middleburg because of its better strategic military position, Rotterdam replaced Dordrecht because, together with the other ports in the region, it joined the political fight for economic rights.⁷ This emergence of new centres of gravity in Zeeland and the delta

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4. J.P. Sigmond, *Nederlandse zeehavens tussen 1500 en 1800* (Amsterdam, 1989), 31. For more information about the ports of Zeeland, see John Davidson and Alexander Gray, *The Scottish Staple at Veere* (London, 1909); H.G. van Grol, *De geschiedenis der oude havens van Vlissingen* (Vlissingen, 1931); H.A.H. Boelmans Kranenburg, 'Zierikzee als visserijplaats', *Zeeuws Tijdschrift*, 3 (1970), 77–84; Erik Van der Doe, 'Het welvaren van Zierikzee. Omvang, ontwikkeling en functioneren van de koopvaardij in Zierikzee, 1746–1775' (unpublished MA thesis, Leiden University, 1986).
 5. Sigmond, *Nederlandse zeehavens*, 72–3.
 6. Sigmond, *Nederlandse zeehavens*, 45.
 7. J. L. van Dalen, *Geschiedenis van Dordrecht* (Dordrecht, 1931–1933). Roelof Bijlsma, *Rotterdamse welvaren 1550–1650* (The Hague, 1918). Johannes P. Backx and *De Haven van Rotterdam, Een onderzoek naar de oorzaken van haar economische betekenis in vergelijking met die van Hamburg en Antwerpen* (Rotterdam, 1929). Hendrik C. Hazewinkel, *Geschiedenis van Rotterdam* (3 vols., Amsterdam, 1940–1942). Kees Hazelzet, *Rotterdam, van vissersdorp tot wereldhaven* (Rotterdam, 1943). Jeanette Kossman and Alfred K. Kossman, *Rotterdam en*

was a sign of a slow but permanent economic shift from the south to the north, in the direction of the Zuiderzee ports.

The rise of the Zuiderzee complex started in the early sixteenth century. Kampen capitalized on the gains of its participation in the Hanse, while Hoorn, Enkhuizen and Harlingen specialized in the fisheries and the Baltic trade. Amsterdam was, at the time, the smallest port in the area and showed no specific tendency to specialize. The competitive advantage of the Zuiderzee ports, compared to their counterparts in Zeeland and the Delta, was the role they played as connectors between the Baltic, the Low Countries (via sea routes) and the Central European markets (through the main inland waterways).⁸

The Dutch Revolt changed the balance of the Zuiderzee complex as much as it influenced the destinies of the Zeeland and Delta ports. Hoorn and Enkhuizen were the first to support the Prince of Orange and, in return, both ports received substantial commercial privileges. Harlingen, Kampen and Amsterdam, by contrast, delayed offering their support and, because of this hesitation, their economic position deteriorated. Amsterdam's pre-eminence only started after it had sworn fidelity to the States-General and in response to a set of international incentives, including migratory flows from the Southern Netherlands, especially Antwerp.⁹

The Golden Age of the Dutch Republic (roughly between 1580 and 1650) witnessed the expansion of Amsterdam into a global market for products and services. Dutch participation in the European routes and overseas exchanges was led, directly or indirectly, from or through Amsterdam. By the mid-seventeenth century, however, there were signs of change in the international conjuncture. The Dutch were consequently at risk of losing their dominance in the Baltic, the Mediterranean and the South Atlantic. These international developments, allied with growing environmental challenges and the economic specialization of some Dutch ports with reduced hinterland networks, catapulted the Dutch Republic into a general commercial decline.¹⁰ As a result, the Dutch ports became regional players within the enlarged context in Europe and overseas.

de zee. De geschiedenis van de haven van Rotterdam (Rotterdam, 1964). E. A. Engelbrecht and W.J.L. Poelmans, *De vroedschap van Rotterdam, 1572–1795* (Rotterdam, 1973).

8. Sigmond, *Nederlandse zeehavens*, 58.

9. Violet Barbour, *Capitalism in Amsterdam in the Seventeenth Century* (Baltimore, 1966). H. Brugmans, *Geschiedenis van Amsterdam*, (3 vols., Amsterdam, 1973). M. Heijder, *Amsterdam korenschuur van Europa* (Amsterdam, 1979). Clemens M. Lesger, 'Amsterdam, Harlingen and Hoorn. Port functions in the Zuiderzee region during the middle of the seventeenth century', in W. G. Heeres, et al., eds., *From Dunkirk to Danzig. Shipping trade in the North Sea and the Baltic, 1350–1850* (Hilversum, 1988), 331–60; *Hoorn als stedelijk knooppunt: stedensystemen tijdens de late middeleeuwen en vroegmoderne tijd* (Hilversum, 1990); and *Handel in Amsterdam ten tijde van de Opstand* (Amsterdam, 2002). A. M. van der Woude, *Het Noorderkwartier: een regionaal historisch onderzoek in de demografische en economische geschiedenis van westelijk Nederland van de late middeleeuwen tot het begin van de negentiende eeuw* (3 vols., Wageningen, 1972). Richtje J. de Vries, *Enkhuizen 1650–1850. Bloei en achteruitgang van een Zuiderzeestad* (Amsterdam, 1987). Pieter Koster, *Hoorn in de middeleeuwen. De economische ontwikkelingsgang van een Westfries stad* (Amsterdam, 1929). Luuc Kooijmans, *Onder regenten. De elite in een Hollandse stad, Hoorn 1700–1780* (Amsterdam, 1985).

10. Sigmond, *Nederlandse zeehavens*, 155.

Figure 1. Departure of Slave Shipping Trips in the Northern Seaboard, 1590-1870.

Source: TSTD: <http://www.slavevoyages.org>; 21 June 2012.¹¹

When analysing the Dutch ports' participation in Atlantic exchanges, especially in the acquisition, shipping and sale of enslaved Africans, we witness a complementary trend to the one described above. When compared to its northern seaboard neighbours, the Dutch Republic was the most important slave trader in the region. Indeed, from the 1590s until well into the 1870s, excepting the first forty years of the nineteenth century, the Netherlands was one of the most active areas in the slave trade (see Figure 1).

Even though the Dutch Republic, and later the Kingdom of the Netherlands, encompassed a limited amount of territory, the agglomeration of port systems was quite intense, as we stated earlier. It is not surprising, therefore, that the available data point towards a broad participation in the slave trade on the part of most Dutch ports. Following the regional division noted above, the Zuiderzee and delta ports and the province of Zeeland all participated heavily in slave trading and shipping activities in the Atlantic (see Figure 2). However, their participation during the early modern period was not evenly distributed, with the Zuiderzee ports taking the lead from the 1590s onwards and reaching a peak during the 1660s. The subsequent decline of the Zuiderzee participation in this trade coincided with the general decline of the Golden Age, although it was not until the

11. Given that the TSTD has been criticized for being organized according to national carriers, we have opted in our analysis to take account of all vessels departing from the Dutch Republic, either sailing under the Dutch or another flag. We have also taken into consideration slave vessels sailing under the Dutch flag but departing from ports outside the Dutch Republic. The same criteria were applied to ships departing from the northern seaboard. For detailed criticism of the TSTD's classification according to national carriers, see Paul E. Lovejoy, 'The Upper Guinea Coast and the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database', *African Economic History*, 38 (2010), 4-7.

Figure 2. Dutch Regions Investing in Slave Shipping, 1590-1900.

Source: See Figure 1.

1740s that the ports of Zeeland took over. The delta ports, on the other hand, always maintained a modest direct participation in these activities.

The traditional historiography on Dutch participation in the slave trade has always emphasized the predominance of the ports of Zeeland as the main entrepreneurs in slave commerce and shipping.¹² Figure 3 seems to contradict these common assumptions. Until the 1740s, the port of Amsterdam and its outport, Texel, controlled the majority of the departures of ships contracted to engage in the Atlantic slave trade, thus leaving the ports of Zeeland and the delta with only very modest shares of this business. Elsewhere we have argued extensively why Amsterdam was able to dominate this specific trade throughout the seventeenth and much of the eighteenth centuries.¹³ Suffice it to say here that individual entrepreneurship and a continuing shortfall in the available shipping capacity of the WIC provided the Amsterdam business community with yet another source of income.

The ports of Zeeland started becoming significant for the slave trade and shipping around the mid-eighteenth century. During this period, the WIC and MCC relied on the shipping and entrepreneurial capacities of the Zeeland investors to meet the import quotas needed to sustain the plantation economies in the Dutch, English, French and Scandinavian Caribbean and on the Dutch Wild Coast. There is therefore a direct correlation between the intensification of the Zeeland ports' participation and the rise and development of the Dutch plantation complex.

12. Henk den Heijer, *De Geschiedenis van de WIC* (Zutphen, 2002), chapter 1. P. J. van Winter, *De Westindische Compagnie ter Kamer Stad en Lande* (The Hague, 1978), 2.

13. Cátia Antunes and Filipa Ribeiro da Silva, 'Amsterdam Merchants in the Slave Trade and African Commerce, 1580s-1670s', *Tijdschrift voor Sociale en Economische Geschiedenis*, 9, No. 4 (2012), 3-30.

Figure 3. Ports in the Republic for Slave Voyages, 1590–1800.

Source: See Figure 1.

The shift from Amsterdam to the Zealand ports, mostly Flushing, somewhat contradicts the perception of Peter Sigmond of the development of the Dutch port system. Even though most ports in the Dutch Republic declined in their international participation, losing out in the direct competition with the English on most European routes, these ports nonetheless seem to have flourished in the overseas trades, with slave trading activities as a case in point. While generally declining as transit ports, the Dutch harbours remained strong receptors, transformers and exporters of colonial goods, mostly from the Atlantic.¹⁴ But which ports and port systems in Africa were used by maritime investors in the Dutch Republic in their slaving enterprises?

African Slave Ports: a Web of Systems

Scholarship on the WIC and its participation in the slave trade has traditionally emphasized the role of the Gold Coast and the port of Elmina in Dutch slaving in the Atlantic.¹⁵ However, the information recently gathered in the *TSTD* clearly shows the important function that other regions and ports on the West Coast of Africa played in the Dutch slave trade.

14. Gert Oostindie and Jessica Roitman, 'Introduction', in G. Oostindie and J. Roitman, eds., *Dutch Atlantic Connections, 1680–1800. Linking Empires, Bridging Borders* (Leiden, 2014), 1–25.

15. Ernst van den Boogaart and Pieter C. Emmer, 'The Dutch participation in the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1596–1650', in Henry A. Gemery and Jan S. Hogendorn, eds., *The Uncommon Market: Essays in the Economic History of the Atlantic Slave Trade* (New York, NY, 1979), 353–75.
Henk den Heijer, *Goud, ivoor en slaven: scheepvaart en handel van de Tweede Westindische*

Evidence suggests that Dutch vessels operating in the transatlantic slave trade acquired enslaved Africans in four main regions along the coast of West Africa: the Bight of Benin, the Bight of Biafra and the Gulf of Guinea islands (part of the sub-port system of the Gulf of Guinea), the Gold Coast and West-Central Africa (part of the West-Central African sub-system). The port system of the Gulf of Guinea islands included the Grain, Ivory, Gold and Slave Coasts up to Cape Lopez, and the archipelago of São Tomé. It is important to stress the relevance of the fortress ports on the Gold Coast (Elmina, Axim and Shama in present-day Ghana), the smaller lodges along the gulf, the ports of São Tomé and Santo António in Príncipe (present-day São Tomé and Príncipe), Fernão Pó and Annobon (present-day Equatorial Guinea), the coastal ports along the Bights of Benin and Biafra (in particular Ardra) and the ports further south up to Cape Lopez. Internationally, these ports served two main functions. On the one hand, they were points of departure for cargos of gold, slaves and ivory exported to Europe and the Americas. On the other hand, they ensured a military presence of the Dutch and other Europeans in the region, thus safeguarding against often-failed attempts at achieving political sovereignty and commercial jurisdiction. At a regional level, these ports facilitated some intra-African commerce between neighbouring regions and secured connections between the fortresses and the trading posts, while at a local level they served as nodes in a network of commercial exchanges between trading centres along the coast.

The West-Central African sub-system included small trading posts on the Loango Coast¹⁶ and in Congo and Angola, more specifically Mayumba, Malemba, Loango, Cacongo, Cabinda, Luanda and Benguela (in present-day Angola). At an international level, Luanda and Benguela emerged as the main gateways for exports of enslaved Africans and various African products, including ivory, redwood, beads, and wax. However, smaller ports north of the River Congo and along the Loango Coast also became important players in this business. At both regional and local levels, these ports were connected to inland markets through a network of land routes and waterways that facilitated the transport of commodities and enslaved Africans from the interior to the coast, thus feeding into the intraregional and Atlantic trades. Unlike the Gulf of Guinea sub-system, however, these ports were rarely used to ensure the military presence of the Dutch on the coast, with the sole exception of the short-lived Dutch rule over Angola (1641–48).

Until the 1630s, the extent of Dutch slaving activities was limited, as David Eltis, David Richardson and Jelmer Vos have demonstrated, partly owing to the absence of direct or strong links between Dutch merchants and the colonial areas where slave labour

Compagnie op Afrika, 1674–1740 (Zutphen, 1997); and 'The Western African Trade of the Dutch West India Company, 1674–1740', in Johannes Postma and Victor Enthoven, eds., *Riches from Atlantic Commerce. Dutch Transatlantic Trade and Shipping, 1585–1817* (Leiden, 2003), 139–70. Johannes M. Postma, *The Dutch in the Atlantic slave trade, 1600–1815* (Cambridge, 1990); and 'A Reassessment of the Dutch Atlantic Slave Trade', in Postma and Enthoven, eds., *Riches from Atlantic Commerce*, 115–38. Jelmer Vos, David Eltis and David Richardson, 'The Dutch in the Atlantic World: New Perspectives from the Slave Trade with Particular Reference to the African Origins of the Traffic', in David Eltis and David Richardson, eds., *Extending the Frontiers: Essays on the New Transatlantic Slave Trade Database* (New Haven, CT, 2008), 228–49.

16. Phyllis M. Martin, *The External Trade of the Loango Coast 1576–1870: The Effects of Changing Commercial Relations on the Vili Kingdom of Loango* (Oxford, 1972).

Figure 4. Major regions of slave embarkation, 1590–1830.

Source: See Figure 1.

Note: Queries: Principal region of slave purchase. Flag: Netherlands.¹⁹

was in high demand, with the exception of Brazil.¹⁷ During this early period of Dutch participation in the transatlantic slave trade, West-Central Africa was the main gateway for Dutch slave traders, both for private merchants participating in this commerce (1590s–1623) and during the subsequent years dominated by the commercial monopoly of the WIC (see Figure 4). The sources for this initial period often fail to specify the main ports of embarkation of slaves, though Luanda appears to have been dominant (see Figure 5). This evidence does not come as a surprise, given the involvement of Portuguese Sephardic Jews based in the Dutch Republic in these early Dutch slaving activities and their connections with commercial branches and economic activities in the Iberian American colonies that depended on the use of slave labour for the production and trade in sugar (Brazil), and silver and precious stones (Spanish American colonies).¹⁸

17. Vos, Eltis and Richardson, 'The Dutch in the Atlantic World', 238–9.

18. Antunes and Silva, 'Amsterdam Merchants in the Slave', 3–30. Filipa Ribeiro da Silva, *Dutch and Portuguese in Western Africa*. Empires, Merchants and the Atlantic System, 1580–1674 (Leiden, 2011).

19. In our analysis of the regions and places of slave purchase, we have taken into consideration the recent debates concerning the geographical organization of the TSTD, in particular the

Figure 5. Major ports of slave embarkation, 1590–1830.

Source: See Figure 1.

Note: Queries: Region where voyage began. Flag: Netherlands.

In the 1630s and 1640s, the naval attacks by the WIC and the subsequent takeover of the Portuguese fortresses on the Gold Coast, in Angola and on the island of São Tomé granted the WIC access to new areas, where trade in slaves was an important commercial activity for the coastal, regional and long-distance routes. The growing presence and commercial influence of firstly Dutch private merchants and, after 1623, the WIC on the Slave Coast and in its networks of ports, formerly under the economic influence of Portuguese merchants based in the archipelago of São Tomé, also facilitated Dutch penetration in this trade. The interest of the WIC in these new areas was further stimulated by the takeover of the north-eastern captaincies of Brazil. The Brazilian economy at the time had a growing demand for slaves, especially for use in sugar production and multiple construction works. The combination of these factors resulted in an increase in Dutch participation in the slave trade and a concomitant growth in the number of regions and ports on the African coast visited by Dutch vessels, with a consequent diversification of slave embarkation regions.

Windward Coast, and the division between the Loango Coast and the coastal areas north and south of the Congo River. For further details of these debates, see Lovejoy, 'The Upper Guinea Coast and the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database', 3–4. Jelmer Vos, 'The Slave Trade from the Windward Coast, The Case of the Dutch, 1740–1805', *African Economic History*, 38 (2010), 29–52. Filipa Ribeiro da Silva and Stacey Sommerdyk, 'Reexamining the Geography and Merchants of the West Central African Slave Trade: Looking Behind the Numbers', *African Economic History*, 38 (2010), 77–89.

Traditional scholarship argues that the WIC attack on Elmina and other Gold Coast forts was driven by the demand for slave labour in Brazil.²⁰ [AQ: 1]

Two decades after the conquests in the Gold Coast, however, Elmina still played only a minor role in Dutch slaving activities. Between the 1630s and 1650s, the WIC bought its slaves in three main regions: the Bights of Benin and Biafra, the islands of the Gulf of Guinea, and West-Central Africa (see Figure 4), with Ardra and Luanda (especially between 1641 and 1648) emerging as the main ports of embarkation (see Figure 5).²¹

In the 1650s and following decades, Dutch slave vessels shifted their activities to Ardra, the ports along the Loango Coast and the coastal area north of the River Congo, as a direct consequence of the Portuguese takeover of Angola and São Tomé and gradual reclaiming of commercial influence on the Bights of Benin and Biafra (the *Costa da Mina*), as well as the financial difficulties of the WIC resulting from the war effort and the company's mismanagement of its commercial and human resources.

Until the 1720s, growing numbers of vessels transported slaves from the Bight of Benin and the Gold Coast, in particular Whydah and Elmina, while the supplying areas of the Bight of Biafra and West-Central Africa, which had previously been important, became increasingly less significant within the Dutch context. In the region of West-Central Africa, there was even a redefinition and shift in the main sub-region and primary ports of supply. After the 1740s, Dutch activities began to be concentrated in the area designated by Johannes Postma as 'Congo North', which corresponded to a group of ports located between Cape Lopez and the mouth of the Congo River, including Mayumba, Kiloango, Loango, Boary, Malembo, Cabinda and the River Congo (also known as the River Zaire).²² Until the late eighteenth century, the ports of Ardra (in the Bight of Benin), Loango and north of the River Congo (in West-Central Africa) constituted the main points of embarkation used by Dutch slave traders.

Elmina only became visible as an important centre for slave purchases between 1730 and 1740, and again between 1770 and 1790. Moreover, during the time that the Gold Coast and Elmina were taking the lead in the Dutch slave trade, their prominent positions were constantly being challenged by the ports in the coastal areas of Loango and north of the Congo, as well as by the Windward Coast. These were regions that fell out of the WIC's effective control and, for this reason, were often visited by the vessels of private slave traders (often called *lorrendraaiers*) and privateers operating on the fringes of or completely outside the company's monopoly. The activities of privateers from Zealand and later of the MCC, for instance, were concentrated in these areas.²³ [AQ: 2] Increasing European competition on the Gold and Slave Coasts and in the Bight of Benin was also an important factor driving Dutch slave traders southwards, particularly on

20. Henk den Heijer, 'The Dutch West India Company, 1621–1791', in Postma and Enthoven, eds., *Riches from Atlantic Commerce*, 90–91.

21. Vos, Eltis, and Richardson, 'The Dutch in the Atlantic World', 239

22. For further details on the geographical limits of 'Congo North' and the Loango, see Silva and Sommerdyk, 'Reexamining the Geography and Merchants', 77–105.

23. Ruud Paesie, *Lorrendrayen op Afrika: de Illegale Goederen- en Slavenhandel op West-Afrika tijdens het Achttiende-Eeuwse Handelsmonopolie van de West-Indische Compagnie, 1700–1734* (Amsterdam, 2008). Postma, *The Dutch in the Atlantic slave trade*.

MCC ships,²⁴ to the coastal regions of Loango and Congo. For most of the second half of the eighteenth century, with the exception of the 1750s, 1780s and 1790s, the complex of ports in the coastal region north of the River Congo, together with Malembo and the neighbouring area of Loango, became the main gateways visited by Dutch vessels searching for enslaved Africans to supply New World colonies.

Thus, Dutch slave vessels essentially relied on six main ports of embarkation on the West Coast of Africa – Luanda, Ardra, Whydah, the Congo North ports, Malembo and Elmina – throughout the early modern period. Luanda was the main gateway for slaves until 1650, while in the following decades this key role was taken over by Ardra, Loango, New Calabar, the Congo North ports and Malembo. It was only in 1720–40 and 1780–1800 that Elmina was able to challenge these ports' leading positions and serve as the almost exclusive gateway for Dutch slave vessels. These data clearly challenge the pivotal role attributed to Elmina in the scholarship on the WIC, the company's trade with West Africa and its role in overall Dutch participation in the transatlantic slave trade.²⁵ The next question to ask is where Dutch slavers disembarked their human cargos?

The American Players and the Enslavement of Africans

Dutch participation in slave trading and shipping activities in the Atlantic was not limited to outbound shipping from the Republic and inbound shipping from Africa into the Americas: Dutch slaving activities were also initiated in the Americas. Scholarship on the Dutch slave trade in the Americas has traditionally focused on the Caribbean in general and on the port of Curaçao in particular. This emphasis on Curaçao has helped perpetuate a view of the island as the epicentre of Dutch slave operations in the Americas, owing to its major role as the slave entrepôt for the Caribbean islands and neighbouring regions on the American mainland.²⁶ However, the data assembled by Postma and Van der Oest, as well as the information available in the *TSTD*, challenge this idea (see Figure 6).²⁷

For most of the transatlantic slave trade, vessels sailing under the Dutch flag and carrying enslaved Africans landed in four main American areas: Brazil, the Caribbean region, the Guianas and the Spanish American colonies. Over time the role and importance of each of these regions in the Dutch slave trade changed, with no region appearing to have dominated as an area of disembarkation over the entire period.

24. Vos, Eltis and Richardson, 'The Dutch in the Atlantic World', 238–42.

25. Henk den Heijer, 'The Dutch West India Company, 1621–1791', in Postma and Enthoven, eds., *Riches from Atlantic Commerce*, 90–91. Heijer, *De geschiedenis van de WIC*. Heijer, Goud, ivoor en slaven. Heijer, 'The Western African Trade', 139–70. Vos, Eltis and Richardson, 'The Dutch in the Atlantic World', 238–9.

26. Han Jordaan, 'The Curaçao Slave Market: From Asiento trade to Free trade, 1700–1730', in Postma and Enthoven, eds., *Riches from Atlantic Commerce*, 219–258. Wim Klooster, 'Curaçao and the Caribbean Transit Trade', in Postma and Enthoven, eds., *Riches from Atlantic Commerce*, 203–18. Heijer, *De Geschiedenis van de WIC*.

27. Johannes Postma, 'Suriname and its Atlantic connections', in Postma and Enthoven, eds., *Riches from Atlantic Commerce*, 287–322. Eric W. van der Oest, 'The forgotten colonies of Essequibo and Demerara, 1700–1814', in Postma and Enthoven, eds., *Riches from Atlantic Commerce*, 323–61.

Figure 6. Major ports of slave disembarkation, 1590–1830.

Source: See Figure 1.

Note: Queries: Principal Place of Slave Landing. Flag: Netherlands.

Even if the Dutch Caribbean, and Curaçao in particular, was undoubtedly the main point for Dutch slave landings in the Americas between the 1660s and 1690s, two other regions and their ports challenged this leading position both before and after that period. The ports in the Brazilian captaincy of Pernambuco (Frederikstad, Recife and Porto Calvo) in the 1630s and 1640s, and the ports of Suriname (Paramaribo and the natural harbours at the mouth of the Corantijn and Marowijne rivers) were at the forefront of Dutch slave operations for most of the eighteenth century.²⁸ However, the short-lived preponderance of Curaçao as the main Dutch slave transit port in the Americas did not undermine its prominent position in the context of the intra-Caribbean trade.²⁹

The rise and decline of the ports of Pernambuco, Curaçao and Suriname can be understood in the light of three main events. In the case of the Pernambucan ports, their importance resulted from the Dutch takeover of the north-eastern captaincies of Brazil in 1630, followed by a series of attempts to promote the continuation of sugar production, as well as the commissioning of extensive construction works in the main Dutch cities in the

28. Postma, 'A reassessment of the Dutch Atlantic Slave Trade', 130–35. Postma, 'Suriname and its Atlantic Connections', 305–8. Heijer, 'The West African Trade of the Dutch West India Company, 1674–1740', 143. On Dutch and French relations in the Guiana region, see also: Louis Sicking, *Frontières d'Outre-Mer: La France et les Pays-Bas dans le monde atlantique au XIXe siècle* (Paris, 2006).

29. Klooster, 'Curaçao and the Caribbean transit trade', 206. Jordaen, 'The Curaçao Slave Trade', 220.

colony, all of which swelled the demand for slave labour. The loss of these territories to Portugal in 1654 put an end to Dutch sugar plantation and trading activities in the South Atlantic, and so also brought Dutch slaving in these ports to a halt.

The rise of Curaçao as a main slave entrepôt for the Caribbean regions and adjacent areas on the American mainland was directly linked to the removal of Portuguese slave traders from the management and conduct of the Spanish *asiento* after Portugal's independence in 1640. This left the largest market for African slave labour without its regular suppliers. Curaçao, the local officers of the WIC, the WIC Chamber of Amsterdam and several merchants based in the Republic moved in to take advantage of this situation by assuming the role of importers and re-exporters of enslaved Africans who were transported from Africa to the island and, from there, re-sold and re-shipped around the region. Curaçao's rise was also directly connected to the negotiations and subsequent formal agreements between the directors of the WIC, the holders of the Spanish *asiento* and several Amsterdam-based merchants, including Francisco Ferroni and Joseph and Balthasar Coijmans.³⁰ By 1690, however, the supply of slaves to Spanish America had fallen into the hands of the English and later the French. The loss of the subcontracting of the Spanish *asiento* is visible in the performance of Curaçao as a dominant slave entrepôt for the intra-Caribbean slave trade, as well as for the transatlantic Dutch slave trade.³¹

In addition, we must emphasize that the dominance of Curaçao between the 1660s and the 1690s roughly corresponded to a transitional period in Dutch colonial enterprise. During these decades, the Dutch transformed their colonial settlements in the Atlantic by transferring and adapting the knowledge about sugar cultivation and organization of the plantation complex acquired in the colony of Dutch Brazil³² to the Dutch Caribbean and the Guiana.³³ This forty-year process of transference and adaptation

30. SAA, NA 3678A/172–176: 4 November 1669; NA 3221/675–685, 687, 695–698: 27 April 1675; NA 3221/675; NA 3223/300: 15 November 1675; NA 4766/328: 13 September 1677; NA 4770A/897: 5 November 1682; NA 4770B/167: 5 November 1682. See also: Irene. A. E. Wright, 'The Coymans Asiento (1685–1689)', *Bijdragen voor de Vaderlandsche Geschiedenis en Oudheidkunde*, 6th series, No. 1 (1924), 23–62. Marisa Vega Franco, *El tráfico de esclavos con America; asientos de Grillo Y Lomelin, 1663–1674* (Seville, 1984). Enriqueta Vila Vilar, 'La sublevación de Portugal y la trata de negros', *Ibero-Amerikanisches Archiv*, 2 (1976), 171–92. Postma, *The Dutch in the Atlantic Slave Trade*, 33–8.

31. Postma, 'A Reassessment of the Dutch Atlantic Slave Trade', 134–5. Jordaen, 'The Curaçao Slave Market', 220, 243–6.

32. Pieter C. Emmer, 'The First Global War: The Dutch versus Iberia in Asia, Africa and the New World, 1590–1609', *e-Journal of Portuguese History*, 1 (2003); and 'The Struggle over sugar. The abortive Attack of the Dutch on Portugal in the South Atlantic', *Mare Liberum*, 13 (1997), 57–69. Evaldo Cabral de Mello, *Olinda Restaurada: Guerra e Açúcar no Nordeste, 1630–1654* (Rio de Janeiro, 1975). Evaldo Cabral de Mello, *O Negócio do Brasil: Portugal, os Países Baixos e o Nordeste, 1641–1669* (Rio de Janeiro, 2003). Luiz Felipe de Alencastro, *O Trato dos Videntes: Formação do Brasil no Atlântico Sul, Séculos XVI e XVII* (São Paulo, 2000). Pedro Puntoni, *A Miserable Sorte: A Escravidão Africana no Brasil Holandês e as Guerras do Tráfico no Atlântico Sul, 1621–1648* (São Paulo, 1999). Pedro Puntoni, *Guerras do Brasil, (1504–1654): Ataques e Invasões durante o Brasil-Colônia* (São Paulo, 1992).

33. Cátia Antunes, 'Desarrollo y Características de una Sociedad Multicultural', in Ana Crespo Solana and M. D. Gonzalez-Ripoll, eds., *Historia de las Antillas no Hispanas* (Madrid, 2011),

allowed the Dutch to develop commercial agriculture based on a slave labour regime. The outcome of this process became visible from the 1720s onwards, with the rise of the plantation economies in Suriname, Essequibo, Demerara and Berbice, and the subsequent growth in the volume of Dutch slave trade directed to these colonies, as shown by Postma and Van der Oest.³⁴

The historiography's aforementioned focus on Curaçao as a main platform for the supply of slave labour to the Spanish American colonies on the mainland and in the intra-Caribbean trade network has also helped to portray Dutch slavers mainly as carriers of enslaved Africans for colonies of other European states.³⁵ Although some evidence confirms that Dutch slave traders were indeed engaged in this type of business, the *TSTD* indicates differently, especially for the period after 1674 and most of the eighteenth century, as Vos, Eltis and Richardson also recently showed.³⁶

With the exception of the period when Curaçao dominated as a slave entrepôt (1660s–90s) and when Dutch slavers acted as carriers for non-Dutch colonial areas, most of the vessels sailing under the Dutch flag landed the enslaved Africans in territories controlled by the Dutch, either by the WIC, the *Sociëteit van Suriname* or the entrepreneurs responsible for the colonies of Berbice, Demerara and Essequibo, as the recent studies by Postma and Van der Oest stressed.³⁷ This conclusion is valid both for the period prior to 1650, when slaves carried aboard Dutch vessels were landed in the ports of Dutch Brazil, as well as for the post-1680 and especially post-1710 periods, when most slaves were disembarked in Suriname, with Paramaribo most likely being the key port in these slaving operations (see Figure 7).

In Anglophone scholarship on the Atlantic and the transatlantic slave trade, American ports such as Boston, Charleston, Havana and Montevideo are almost exclusively portrayed as disembarkation ports for slave carriers. In recent years, however, studies of Brazilian ports and Portuguese-Brazilian mercantile groups and their commercial activities in the South Atlantic have started to shed more light on the role of American ports and American-based mercantile groups in the development of slaving activities in the Atlantic. In this particular case, the focus has been mainly on slaving activities connecting Brazil with Angola, and the Bights of Benin and Biafra, but also with the coast of Mozambique in the Indian Ocean.³⁸

421–40. Cátia Antunes, 'Poblacion en las Antillas Neerlandesas, siglos XVI–XXI', in Crespo Solana and Gonzalez-Ripoll, eds., *Historia de las Antillas no Hispanas*, 399–420. Cornelis C. Goslinga, *The Dutch in the Caribbean and on the Wild Coast, 1580–1680* (Assen, 1990); *The Dutch in the Caribbean and in the Guianas 1680–1791* (Assen, 1985); and *A short history of the Netherlands Antilles and Surinam* (The Hague, 1979).

34. Postma, 'Suriname and its Atlantic connections', 305–8. Van der Oest, 'The forgotten colonies of Essequibo and Demerara', 333–7.

35. Klooster, 'An Overview of Dutch Trade with the Americas', 376. Wim Klooster, 'Slavenvaart op Spaanse kusten. De Nederlandse slavenhandel met Spaans Amerika, 1648–1701', *Tijdschrift voor Zeegeschiedenis* (1997), 121–32. Jordaen, 'The Curaçao Slave Market', 243–6.

36. Vos, Eltis and Richardson, 'The Dutch in the Atlantic World', 228–9, 232–6.

37. Postma, 'Suriname and its Atlantic connections', 287–322. Van der Oest, 'The forgotten colonies of Essequibo and Demerara', 323–61.

38. Manolo Florentino, 'The Slave Trade, Colonial Markets, and Slave Families in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, ca. 1790–ca. 1803', in Eltis and Richardson, eds., *Extending the Frontiers*, 275–312.

Figure 7. Major regions of slave disembarkation, 1590–1830.

Source: See Figure 1.

Note: Queries: Principal Region of Slave Landing. Flag: Netherlands.

Another historiographical school has underlined the direct participation of North Americans and Spanish American settlers, particularly in present-day Uruguay, in the transatlantic slave trade.³⁹ Scholars of the Dutch Atlantic have yet to embrace this revisionist approach, even though the Brazilian ports in the regions of Pernambuco (dominated by the Dutch), Bahia and Rio, together with the port of Luanda in Angola (dominated by the Dutch between 1641 and 1648), were places of departure for Dutch vessels involved in

Gustavo Acioli Lopes, 'Negócio da Costa da Mina e Comércio Atlântico: Tabaco, Açúcar, Ouro e Tráfico de Escravos: Pernambuco (1654–1760)' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of São Paulo, Brazil, 2008). Pierre Verger, *Fluxo e Refluxo do Tráfico de Escravos entre o Golfo de Benin e a Bahia de Todos os Santos: dos séculos XVII a XIX* (Salvador, 1997). Manolo Florentino, *Em costas negras. Uma história do tráfico entre a África e o Rio de Janeiro* (São Paulo, 1997). Alexandre Vieira Ribeiro, 'O comércio das almas e a obtenção de prestígio social: traficantes de escravos na Bahia ao longo do século XVIII', *Locus Revista de História*, 12, No. 2 (2006), 9–27. Rae Flory and David Grant Smith, 'Bahian merchants and planters in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries', *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 58, No. 4 (1978), 571–94. John N. Kennedy, 'Bahian Elites, 1750–1822', *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 53, No. 3 (1973), 415–39. On the connections of the Portuguese-Brazilian merchants with Mozambique, see, for instance, José Capela, 'Slave Trade Networks in Eighteenth-Century Mozambique', in Richardson and Silva, eds., *Networks and Trans-Cultural Exchange*, 165–94.

39. David Eltis and David Richardson, 'A New Assessment of the Transatlantic Slave Trade', in Eltis and Richardson, eds., *Extending the Frontiers*, 1–60. David Eltis, 'The U.S. Transatlantic

Figure 8. Major ports of Departure in Africa and the Americas for slave vessels sailing under Dutch flag, 1590-1830.

Source: See Figure 1.

Note: Queries: Place where voyage began. Flag: Netherlands.

slaving ventures during both the 1630s and 1640s. According to the information available in the *TSTD*, these ports in the South Atlantic were in fact responsible for organizing about one quarter of the total number of slave voyages carried out under the Dutch flag prior to 1650 (see Figures 7, 8 and 9).

This evidence clearly shows that, until the 1650s, American ports, particularly in the South Atlantic, played an important role as points of departure for Dutch slave voyages. This contrasts with the subsequent period, during which Dutch slave voyages appear only sporadically to have set sail from ports in the Americas. The difference between the two periods can be better understood if we consider two main points: the characteristics of Portuguese settlement in Brazil prior to Dutch rule over the north-eastern region; and the characteristics of Dutch settlement in the Caribbean and Guiana and the development of a Dutch Atlantic shipping economy in the post-1650 period.

Slave Trade, 1644–1867: An Assessment', *Civil War History*, 54, No. 4 (2008), 347–78. Paul Finkelman, 'Regulating the African Slave Trade', *Civil War History*, 54, No. 4 (2008), 379–405. Karen Fisher Younger, 'Liberia and the Last Slave Ships', *Civil War History*, 54, No. 4 (2008), 424–42.

Figure 9. Region where voyages began, 1571–1700.

Source: See Figure 1.

Note: Queries: Region where voyage began. Flag: Netherlands.

When the Dutch WIC took control of the north-eastern captaincies of Brazil, there was an established organization in place to outfit voyages for acquiring slaves in Angola. After the Dutch takeover of Luanda in 1641, the commercial officials of the WIC basically continued a system of trade routes already in use by the Portuguese. According to the *TSTD*, slave vessels started to set sail directly for Africa from Brazil as early as the 1570s (see Figure 9).⁴⁰ It is also likely that knowledge of this commercial organization was at the core of the WIC's decision to organize the military campaigns for conquering the ports of Luanda and São Tomé in the early 1640s.

After the 1650s, the transfer of the main Dutch commercial activities and plantations to the Caribbean and the Guianas almost brought about the end of Dutch slave voyages from American ports. Two reasons for this may be suggested. First, the new centres lacked the logistical and economic structures necessary to organize this type of venture. In particular, the settlement and development of the Dutch Caribbean and Suriname depended on the initiative and capital of merchants based in the Dutch Republic. In other

40. For further details on the direct slave trade between Angola and Brazil, see Alexandre Vieira Ribeiro, 'The Transatlantic Slave Trade to Bahia, 1582–1851', in Eltis and Richardson, eds., *Extending the Frontiers*, 130–54. Daniel B. Domingues da Silva and David Eltis, 'The Slave Trade to Pernambuco, 1561–1851', in Eltis and Richardson, eds., *Extending the Frontiers*, 95–129. Luiz Felipe de Alencastro, 'The Economic Network of Portugal's Atlantic World', in Francisco Bethencourt and Diogo Ramada Curto, eds., *Portuguese Oceanic Expansion, 1400–1800* (Cambridge, 2007), 109–37.

words, the Dutch adopted a model identical to the one implemented by England, Scotland, France and, to a certain extent, the Scandinavian kingdoms when seeking to develop their plantation economy. This contrasted with the economic organization of the Lusophone South Atlantic, where considerable volumes of trade, agricultural production and mineral extraction were channelled into exchanges *between* colonial spaces rather than with Portugal.⁴¹

Moreover, the Brazilian economy evolved over the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries from one based mainly on sugar and dyewood to a more diversified system able to combine the production and extraction of various products, specifically eau-de-vie (*cachaça*), tobacco and gold.⁴² These three products were not only in high demand in Europe, but also in Africa. This allowed Brazilian merchants to engage directly in the slave trade. By contrast, the colonial Caribbean economies became highly specialized in the production of cash crops; products for which there was little or no demand in African markets at the time. Without facilities for ship building and outfitting, without competitive exports for Africa, and with substantial parts of the production output committed to supplying European markets as part of the mortgage schemes and ‘debt economy’ organized from Amsterdam, colonial landowners and small and mid-size merchants stood little chance – unlike their Brazil-based counterparts – of succeeding in any attempt to try to organize their own slave trade activities.⁴³

Conclusion

This article started out by questioning whether the changes in the slave trade and shipping enterprises led by the Dutch were a European or an Atlantic-driven process, following the enticing proposal by Pierre Gervais in his 2008 article.⁴⁴ We can but conclude that, in the Dutch case, most of the entrepreneurial initiative indeed resided in Europe or in the hands of Europeans. The Dutch European ports took the lead in this effort, starting with the overwhelming participation of Amsterdam in this traffic, followed by the Zeeland ports after 1740.

Dutch European participation also extended to the use and development of a plurality of port sub-systems and a multiplicity of individual ports on the West Coast of Africa. However, even though traditional historiography has portrayed this overall participation as being mainly institutionally driven by the chartered companies and has underlined the pre-eminence of Dutch settlement in Elmina, we have demonstrated that

41. Jorge Pedreira, ‘Costs and Financial Trends in the Portuguese Empire, 1415–1822’, in Bethencourt and Curto, eds., *Portuguese Oceanic Expansion*, 49–87. Alencastro, ‘The Economic Network of Portugal’s Atlantic World’, 109–37. Stuart Schwartz, ‘The economy of the Portuguese Empire’, in Bethencourt and Curto, eds., *Portuguese Oceanic Expansion*, 30–34.

42. Lopes, ‘Negócio da Costa da Mina’. José C. Curto, *Enslaving Spirits. The Portuguese-Brazilian Alcohol trade at Luanda and its hinterland, c.1550–1830* (Leiden, 2005).

43. Bram Hoonhout, ‘Subprime Plantation Mortgages in Suriname, Essequibo and Demerara, 1750–1800. On manias, Ponzi processes and illegal trade in the Dutch negotiatie system’ (unpublished MA thesis, Leiden University, 2012).

44. Gervais, ‘Neither Imperial, nor Atlantic’, 465–473.

private entrepreneurship was the key element in Dutch slave trading, and that Elmina was not the only outlet for slave exports, with ports in West-Central Africa also playing a pivotal role. There is an urgent need, therefore, to proceed towards a revisionist approach to the intrinsic institutional, economic and military value of the Dutch presence and business participation in the region during the early modern period.

Slave traders operating from the Dutch Republic were also responsible for most of the organization and fulfilment of the slave trade and shipping in the Americas. The data provided by the *TSTD* underlines the role of Curaçao as a transit port for imports of slaves into the Caribbean, while also stressing the major role played by the ports of Suriname in meeting the labour demands of the Dutch colonies.

The only significant instance in which Dutch slave imports and shipping depended solely on entrepreneurs living in Atlantic space was the case of Dutch Brazil (1630s–50s). Following the existing Luso-Brazilian model of linking the American colonies with the very restricted African settlements and trading posts, the Dutch temporarily took hold of a South Atlantic commercial route that operated independently and despite prohibitions in Europe. Yet this exception, inherited from the Luso-Brazilian experience, is insufficient to contradict Gervais's assumption that most of what happened in the Atlantic was actually determined in Europe. This was indeed so in the Dutch case. However, the Dutch demand for slaves within an Atlantic context also gave rise to a 200-year continuum of exchanges and mutual maritime port influences, whereby the term 'windows of global exchange' would seem to encapsulate the perpetual entanglement of spaces and histories.

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